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**Written Testimony Submitted to the
Maryland Senate Finance Committee
By Karin Alejandra Roseblatt, Professor of History
Vice President, UMD-CP Chapter, American Association of University Professors**

**SB 247
State Personnel – Collective Bargaining – Faculty, Part-Time Faculty, and Graduate
Assistants
February 16, 2023**

FAVORABLE

Good afternoon, Chair Griffith, Vice Chair Klausmeier, and members of the Senate Finance Committee. I am Karin Roseblatt, and I am a Professor of History at the University of Maryland, College Park, where I have worked for 15 years. I serve also as Vice President of our College Park chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), and I am on the AAUP's National Council. I urge this committee to issue a favorable report to SB 247.

As you know, the bill before you does not prescribe unionization and collective bargaining. It only allows for that possibility. Passage of this bill seems uncontroversial. After all, unlike legislatures elsewhere, the Maryland legislature is not anti-union. Unlike legislators in Florida or Indiana, Maryland legislators have not been trying to undermine institutions of higher education, curtail the free speech rights of faculty, or dictate what and how we teach.

Universities are under threat in many states, where State governments seek to limit the free inquiry that has made our universities the envy of the world. But institutions of higher education are also threatened by the longstanding defunding of higher education and by top-down management styles that erode shared governance. Maryland faculty, like their colleagues around the country, feel very deeply the fragility of our higher education institutions and our livelihoods. My colleagues and I feel acutely that we must have every tool available to us to be able to speak loudly, with a collective voice. Collective bargaining is an effective form of faculty voice, one which the AAUP has long viewed as compatible with—and indeed able to prop up—institutions of shared governance.

In my role as faculty member, I regularly teach and advise graduate and undergraduate students interested in the History of Latin America and the Caribbean. I also run a Center for Historical Studies in my Department. I headed our Latin American Studies Center for five years. And I am Principal Investigator for a five-year National Science Foundation Grant to promote and develop the History of Science, Technology, Environment, and Medicine in Latin America and the Caribbean. I do a lot of service to my

profession as well, conducting tenure, promotion and department reviews for other institutions; peer reviewing books and articles; serving on prize, nomination, and program committees for professional organizations and my university; mentoring graduate students from other institutions and early career scholars.

I find this work very satisfying, but since the ranks of tenured professors has dwindled, the workload for those of us remaining has become untenable. Tenured faculty do a lot of unremunerated work, but at least we are paid decently—if not well—by our employers. A crisis within academia is reaching a breaking point as the majority of our untenured faculty members (75% of all higher education instructors in Maryland's institutions of higher education) do not have the ability to take on this work. Their teaching is simply too taxing for them to do unpaid service work. The Universities that have produced so much cutting edge research and given so much luster to the United States and to the State of Maryland are imperiled.

As Vice President of our campus AAUP chapter, I have learned a great deal about the issues our faculty face on the College Park campus. Let me underscore the three issues that come up most frequently: the failures of shared governance; poor working conditions for non-tenure-line faculty; and working conditions for graduate students. Collective bargaining can provide a democratic means of addressing all three areas of concern.

Faculty Governance is not working. I have long observed that on my campus, committees in which faculty are meant to play key roles according to the Universities own guidelines are chock full of administrators. This was clearly the case with the University's Strategic Planning Committee. Its members had an average salary of over \$300,000. This year, a hiring committee for a Dean of the Graduate School had two students and two faculty members among its sixteen members. And a Budget Subcommittee of the University Senate, which was meant to increase transparency and accountability is dormant because it has not been given the information it needs to function. Almost all University committees are like this, even ones dealing with curriculum. This contravenes the letter and spirit of shared governance.

More troubling still is the proliferation of programs staffed by non-tenure track faculty. In these programs, administrators make all the curricular decisions—again in contravention of the principles of shared governance. Moreover, faculty who are worried about whether their contract will be renewed or not are loath to raise their voices. The non-tenure-track faculty who are closest to our students—and who teach 70% of the credit hours on our campus—are effectively muzzled. This situation pleases administrators who think they know best and often follow the latest fad (often based on shoddy research). But it is not good for our students. Those who teach our students, who are closest to our students, need a firm voice in curricular policies and policies regarding research.

Working conditions for non-tenure-track faculty are abysmal. To say that non-tenure-track faculty on our campus are upset would be a gross understatement. They are fearful and resentful. They work very hard for our students but feel unappreciated. They cannot teach or give opinions freely because they fear that their contracts will not be renewed. Many declined to write testimony for this hearing because they feel vulnerable to reprisal. The most common complaint we hear at College Park is not about low salaries, but about job insecurity. It is one thing to face unemployment if you are in a field where there is job mobility and/or decent wages. But academic jobs are scarce, people have family responsibilities that limit mobility, and low pay means that there is no buffer to cushion unemployment.

I know of one colleague, who has worked at the institution for over twenty years and had her salary cut in half simply because the Chair of her Department felt she was too abrasive. A group of instructors in an Honors College received their contract days before the start of classes to find that their teaching load had

been increased. These types of stories are common because policies do not provide security or stability, and there is no enforcement of existing policies. The result is a majority of faculty cowed and beaten down. Despite the admirable job these faculty do teaching our students, students cannot learn to be innovative, entrepreneurial, and creative when their instructors are just trying to keep their heads down.

Graduate Assistants are overworked and underpaid. You will hear University administrators say that unionization will ruin the relationship between advisors and mentees. But they have never asked faculty our opinion! Most faculty I know feel that the low stipends and poor work conditions endured by graduate students is one of the main issues our University faces, and that it undermines the standing of our institution.

Because I have supervised more than 10 PhD and MA students and sat on the committees of dozens more, I can speak from personal experience. I have personally supervised graduate assistants who worked as bartenders on the weekends. One of my advisees taught a course at Prince George's Community College to make ends meet. I routinely sign papers that allow my students to take on work above and beyond the twenty hours a week that graduate assistants are normally permitted to work. I do so reluctantly, because this is time that they should be devoting to their studies. But I sign nevertheless because the students cannot survive without a supplement to their income. I note that this no doubt makes it more difficult for graduate assistants to complete their degrees in a timely manner, and this is an important metric against which our university is measured. It is exceedingly difficult to recruit top graduate students when stipends are low.

The international graduate students who powerfully contribute to the prestige and finances of our campus are particularly vulnerable. They are by law prohibited from working outside the universities where they study. They have additional travel costs. And many come to the United States with their families. US immigration legislation prohibits the spouses of these students from working. Can you imagine trying to support a spouse—or a spouse and child—with \$25,000 while paying for books and other research expenses? I personally know a student in that situation. He is, unsurprisingly, food insecure.

Many graduate assistants are asked to work more than the required twenty hours a week. I have seen this more than once in my own department. During the current COVID19 crisis, one of my own advisees had to in essence take over a course when the instructor of record disappeared. He had minimal support, and he was not teaching in his area of expertise. This kind of experience obviously slows a student's progress toward their degree. Many departments are not good at informing graduate assistants about their rights and obligations. Nor are many faculty members aware of what is appropriate. A graduate assistant union would help clarify and publicize rights and obligations of graduate assistants.

The Bottom Line. You may be asking how much unionization might cost the State and its Universities. Keep in mind that only 28.7% of the UMD budget goes toward instruction and that every year the University takes in about \$130 million more than it spends. Current administration has chosen to increase the number of administrators 42% from 2015 to 2019 and an additional 8.4% from 2020 to 2022. The largest increases in spending are in the institutional expenses category, which includes the salaries of upper administration. The second largest increases are in the category that includes Deans and Associate Deans. Budgets are about choices. University administrators have made their choices. Now let faculty and graduate students make theirs.